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ABSTRACT

Students at the University Without Walls (UWW) of the University of Minnesota design their own program by writing a Long Term Degree Plan to describe how they plan to demonstrate their competence in each of UWW's seven graduation criteria. Because students have experienced difficulty in writing the plan, a seminar in process education was developed to help students develop skills in question-asking, reflecting, and synthesizing for the purpose of integrating their academic education with their experiential education into a bachelor's degree program. A pilot test of the seminar during the fall quarter used an experimental group of 12 persons (who took the seminar) and a control group of 17 persons (who did not). The subjects were invited to participate, and both groups were given the same pretests and posttests. At the end of the seminar, both groups wrote a rough draft of their Long Term Degree Plan. Both groups received similar scores that were relatively high. It was determined, however, that in general, students in the control group were older, longer established in their careers, and had more education than those in the experimental group. Student evaluations of the seminar indicated that it was useful for those who participated. (LSM)

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University Without Walls

SEMINAR IN PROCESS EDUCATION

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April 1977

U S DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE
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One of the primary characteristics of the adult students in the University Without Walls program is that they are self-directed. They have clearly defined educational goals; they need help in planning how to meet their goals and in using appropriate learning resources. Most adult students in UWW want to include experiential learning as part of their degree program. The University Without Walls program helps students develop their degree programs through a Seminar in Process Education.

Before discussing the seminar specifically, I would like to recall some adult development theories that will help describe the self-directed learner. Adult students are described here as students over twenty-five years of age. Twenty-five has become the chronological age used to separate adult students from students who enter and complete college immediately after graduating from high school.

As I continue to learn from the adult students in UWW and to study developmental characteristics and trends of adults, I become increasingly reluctant to define the term self-directed learner. Rather, I would propose that there are many characteristics that contribute to an adult student's being or becoming self-directed. Not all of them, nor even a combination of specific characteristics, need be present for a person to be deemed a self-directed learner. I will suggest several characteristics, including some suggested by the experts, that an adult self-directed learner might possess. The

characteristics of a self-directed learner derive from theories of ego development and theories of intellectual development, as well as from learning theory and learning styles.

Neugarten's stages of adult development indicate that the chronological age of adults coincides with their moving from an outward direction to an inner-directedness. Adults in their 20's and early 30's are concerned with external developments, such as establishing marriage, family, career, and social status. Adults in their mid 30's and beyond, once the "externals" are fairly secure, then turn inward and re-examine their achievements, goals, and future directions. This inward look has definite implications for the adult students who are returning to college or entering college for the first time. This will be discussed later.

Kohlberg, Perry and Loevinger have developed separate, but compatible theories of ego, moral and ethical development. Their stages of development include characteristics of adults labeled as conforming, conscientious, autonomous, committeed, conceptually complex and objective, among others.

Bloom's theory of cognitive intellectual development is posited on a progression from one stage of intellectual ability to the next higher stage. His stages, in sum, include memorization as the "lowest" level of intellectual ability, then application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation as the "highest" intellectual level. According to Bloom, as a learner moves through each stage he/she becomes increasingly self-directed.

Finally Chickering, adapting materials developed by Lasker and Dewindt, translated the various types of development (ego, moral, intellectual) into a schema that includes several educational components along with the developmental stages. The educational components

include motives for education, learning process, source and use of knowledge, teaching practices, and student/teacher relationships.

This cursory over-view of a mass of complex material is intended to express the relationships among all aspects of adult development and the adult as a self-directed learner. I would urge you to study further each of the theories; some references for doing so are cited in the bibliography at the end of the paper.

The adult development theories might be summarized by listing several characteristics of self-directed learners. They are the following: ambitious, goal-directed, analytical, competent, autonomous, responsible. Self-directed learners know themselves, their strengths and weaknesses; they are somewhat unsure of their academic ability, but fairly sure of their intellectual ability. These characteristics describe UWW's adult students. To illustrate some of the characteristics of a self-directed adult student in UWW, I will describe two students currently enrolled in the UWW program.

Peggy, age 36, is currently an administrative assistant to a vice-president of one of the Twin Cities' largest corporations. She had completed two years of formal college prior to applying to UWW two years ago. When she was admitted to UWW, she was the sole supporter of her two children, working full-time and heavily involved in volunteer work. In her job, Peggy has full responsibility for a major social action project, negotiates with labor unions, and represents her company at national conferences on corporate responsibility. She has also represented her company at Urban League and NAACP national conferences. Her major study area is Employee Communications within the overall field of Business. Peggy has completed three self-designed projects in UWW,

taken several extension courses in business, and is currently completing her major project, an independent study project which analyzes her company's major involvement in the social action project referred to above.

Bill, age 52, had completed about two years of formal college prior to applying to UWW. He is president of his own marketing company and was formerly a vice-president with a major U.S. oil company. He is involved in church activities, civic volunteer groups, teaching and lecturing in the field of human sexuality. Bill has documented many prior learning experiences as part of his UWW program. He was invited by an instructor in the University of Minnesota human sexuality program to team-teach an undergraduate course. He uses his expertise in photography and film to make teaching films in human sexuality. Bill has just completed his major project in redesigning the course he taught and will graduate from UWW during spring quarter.

UWW enabled both Peggy and Bill to continue in their job situations and earn their degrees at the same time. Both were certain of what they wanted to study, but need direction in how to plan their curriculum to reach their educational goals.

Let me now briefly describe the UWW program and a planning seminar we have developed to help orient our adult students to the UWW program and to their roles as self-directed students.

Education derived through UWW differs from a traditional undergraduate education primarily in the design and delivery of learning opportunities available to students. A UWW education includes the traditional concept of liberal education, an acquaintance with a broad array of intellectual thought. In addition, UWW attempts to educate

through what we term process education. We define process education as helping students develop skills in question-asking, reflecting, analyzing and synthesizing for the purpose of integrating their academic education with their experiential education into a baccalaureate degree program.

One of the premises on which the UWW program is based is that a student must accept the primary responsibility for the outcomes of his/her education and must be an active participant in charting the most appropriate degree course for achieving his/her learning goals. The vehicle used by UWW students to design their program is a Long Term Degree Plan. The Long Term Degree Plan describes the methods by which students will demonstrate their competence in each of UWW's graduation criteria. It also contains the students' timetable for completing their UWW program. The attached sheet is a sample page from a Long Term Degree Plan. It shows how students combine prior and present learning experiences with formal academic education. The diagram on the reverse side of the Long Term Degree Plan is entitled "University Without Walls Seminar in Process Education". It will help you see how a degree program is structured. You will note that there are seven graduation criteria, shown on the left, which represent the components of a liberal education. The ways in which students can meet those criteria are shown on the right side of the page. The definition we use for each of the graduation criteria is given on the page following the diagram.

We find that students often have difficulty deciding how to incorporate the two parts of the diagram into one degree program. The criteria of academic achievement and major project focus on the student's

main study area and include a knowledge of content, theory, and application, demonstrated through the major project. The criteria of scientific inquiry and artistic expression are generally demonstrated through a combination of subject matter content in one of the sciences or arts and an appreciation for or personal involvement in those disciplines as a "doer". The remaining criteria (self-directed study skills, communication skills, variety of learning activities) are concerned less with specific content and more with students' ability to organize and recognize relationships, to reflect upon and integrate learning and experience, and to assume primary responsibility for designing plans to meet their learning objectives. UWW students generally have had difficulty first, in understanding the concepts of process education and secondly, in applying those concepts to their degree program in accord with the UWW graduation criteria.

In past years UWW advisors have spent a great deal of time with students on an individual basis discussing the graduation criteria and the integration of various kinds of learning experiences. Advisors have, in the past, relied on their individual abilities and inclinations to assist students in understanding the concepts of process education. Advisors are not equally skilled in conveying those concepts and we have found that an individualized approach is not the most effective way of helping students understand the components of process education.

Thus a more systematic orientation to the UWW educational process was introduced through the UWW Process Education Seminar. The seminar was developed through a grant from the Small Grants Program at the University of Minnesota and pilot tested with students admitted to UWW for fall quarter 1976. Students who are geographically accessible to

the Minneapolis campus were invited to be part of the experimental group and to participate in the seminar. Students who live at a distance from Minneapolis were invited to be in the control group. The experimental group included twelve students, the control group seventeen. Students in both groups were given a "pre-test" consisting of open-ended questions designed to elicit the following information: 1) students' general understanding of the UMM graduation criteria; 2) students' educational objectives and their knowledge of the components of a liberal education; 3) the distinction and relation between students' educational objectives and career objectives. The responses from students in both groups were very similar, and in many instances, identical. We concluded that both groups of entering UMM students generally had common knowledge, misconceptions, and questions about the UMM graduation criteria and educational process.

The seminar met for twelve two-hour weekly meetings. Each meeting focussed on presenting, discussing and responding to questions about one of the UMM graduation criteria. The seminar instructors tried to incorporate the process education concepts with the academic content criteria and to give illustrations of how to combine the two elements. Students were given time during seminar meetings to begin developing their Long Term Degree Plans, to describe their various learning activities, and to explain how they planned to integrate formal and informal learning experiences into their degree programs. It was anticipated that having participated in the seminar, the experimental group would emerge at the end of fall quarter with a more precise understanding of the UMM graduation criteria than would the control group. Further, it was assumed that the experimental group would

possess a greater facility in describing and analyzing their various learning experiences than would the control group. At the end of fall quarter, students in both groups would be asked to write the first draft of their Long Term Degree Plan, focussing on detailed descriptions of the self-directed study skills and variety of learning activities criteria.

There were at least eight significant variables over which the seminar project had no control. They were the following: 1) the nature and frequency of contact with students' UWW program advisor; 2) the nature and frequency of contact with their University of Minnesota faculty and community faculty advisors; 3) the amount of prior formal education; 4) the amount of work experience that a student would use as part of his/her UWW program; 5) the amount of time and energy available to students for UWW seminar work, given their job and family responsibilities; 6) the availability of library and personnel resources; 7) the clarity in the student's mind of his/her main study area; 8) the level of students' ability to conceptualize and write in an "academic" context. In the seminar meetings, we tried to handle these variables with students on an individual basis. Undoubtedly there were other variables that affected both the performance of each student and of the two groups. Those variables certainly influenced the degree to which accurate comparisons of the two groups could be made.

The weekly seminar meetings approached the graduation criteria from a question/answer perspective; and asked students to write in class about their learning experiences and how they were to be used in their UWW program. It did not take long for students to begin to

question staff about the meaning of the graduation criteria. They wanted to know how to approach the criterion of self-directed study skills. They urged the staff to describe ways a student could demonstrate self-directedness. They asked how a person would relate a main study area such as day care administration to a variety of learning activities. The staff questioned students about their learning experiences. The students posed possibilities of ways in which their learning experiences seemed related to one another, but wanted some assurance that their thinking was logical.

We found that the adult students in the seminar were initially quite reluctant to talk specifically about learning experiences that were not related to formal classroom settings. The students would state that they "had done many things for which they should receive credit", but it was often difficult to elicit from them specific learning activities. Seminar students demonstrated the characteristics of security in their intellectual ability, but some uncertainty about their academic ability and how to translate various kinds of learning experiences into a degree program. A major difficulty was and still is, getting students to analyze an experience from the viewpoint of what was learned, rather than the perspective of simply going through the experience. An example is the following. A student has worked fifteen years as a personnel administrator in a small company. Undoubtedly he has learned many specific techniques and pieces of information to enable him to perform his job well. But those specific techniques or facts may not comprise a learning activity in an academic sense. The person would need to relate those isolated parts of his job within the theoretical framework of personnel administration,

management theory, or organizational management, in order for them to be incorporated into his UWW degree program. In other words, the student needs to identify the parts of the particular experience to be used for his/her degree program. Then those parts must be examined within the broader context of the academic discipline. Finally the student needs to draw some conclusions about the learning experience in relation to that broader context. The fact that UWW is a non-credit based program adds to the difficulty because we are not able to tell students that X experience is worth five credits, while Y experience is worth eight credits. We always return to the necessity of students' integrating theoretical concepts with practical experiences. That is the most difficult task for most UWW adult students. They often tend to take the theory for granted, or do not readily see its usefulness to them in their present job situation. We find that adult students want to know that whatever they are studying is of immediate use. For many students that means usefulness in their job situation, since the adult students in UWW tend to choose a main study area that is closely related to their job or career. Again, some of the characteristics of a self-directed learner were manifest in seminar students' practical orientations to their degree programs. The characteristics of goal-oriented, autonomous, and ambitious were evident throughout the seminar.

The UWW program enables students to make the choice of using job related learning experiences, but also is committed to offering students a liberal education, rather than a strictly vocational education. The task of students in UWW is to understand the relation-

ship between theory and practice. They need to demonstrate breadth of knowledge as well as depth in their main study area. The seminar meetings almost always included discussion of those relationships.

In addition to developing a fairly clear understanding of the UWW graduation criteria and how to plan their UWW programs, students derived other benefits from the seminar. One was the opportunity to interact with each other. One of the hardships faced by students in UWW is the "learning in isolation" syndrome. Because the program is individualized with no required courses or common meeting times, it is not unusual for a student to spend two years in UWW and never meet another UWW student. So the student interaction provided opportunities for students to discuss common study areas, help each other identify resources, and sometimes develop friendships.

UWW staff members also were challenged by the seminar. Staff enjoyed the process of probing, questioning, drawing out students to talk about and analyze their learning experiences. Students saw staff members in roles other than those of advisors. Staff members shared in presenting many of the sessions and students became acquainted with staff thinking about the UWW graduation criteria. Staff members clarified their own thinking and learned from students about issues such as new ways of integrating prior learning experiences into a degree program. Students and staff enjoyed learning from each other in a group setting, which is a novel experience in UWW.

At the end of fall quarter, students in both the experimental and control groups were asked to write a rough draft of their Long Term Degree Plan, focussing on the criteria of self-directed study skills and variety of learning activities. Each student's papers

were read by three UWW staff members and evaluated according to specified criteria and a uniform rating scale. Each student's mean score was computed and mean scores for the two groups were computed. We were surprised to discover that the mean scores for the two groups were very close, both groups receiving similar scores that were relatively high.

Our initial reaction was that because of the closeness of scores on the post-test drafts, participation in the seminar did not help the experimental group's ability to write their post-test papers. However, as we looked at other factors, we realized that was not the case. Some of the uncontrollable variables listed earlier seem to have influenced the post-test responses. For example, students in the control group tended to be older and longer established in their careers. They also had more learning opportunities to include in their discussion of self-directed study skills and variety of learning activities than did students in the experimental group. The average age of students in the experimental group was 30, while the average age of students in the control group was 37. Most students in the control group had completed two to three years of formal college work prior to enrolling in UWW and planned to graduate in a year or less. Students in the experimental group, on the other hand, tended to have less formal college experience and planned to spend at least two years in UWW.

Responses of the experimental group to the written evaluation of the seminar demonstrated that the seminar was useful for those who participated. Students indicated that the seminar helped them learn to analyze learning activities and to integrate non-classroom

learning with formal learning experiences. In addition, students felt that they better understood how to communicate their various ways of learning through the required UWW documents.

The seminar is being offered again during this current quarter. This time we are using more outside reading than we did previously. For example, in discussing the UWW graduation criterion of variety of learning activities, we asked students to read a short autobiographical sketch of Rosemary Reuther in which she described the personal experiences throughout her life that helped her learn new things about herself, her family and work relationships and her progress in intellectual growth. For the criterion of self-directed study skills, students read a chapter from Kidd's How Adults Learn. Students were able to identify with many of Kidd's descriptions of the adult learner and the "self-learner". Kidd's discussion of factors such as time, educational and work experience, and organization of learning made a great deal of sense to our students who find themselves in many of the situations described in that chapter. Then we discussed the reading during the seminar meetings. For the next class we assigned students to draft their response to the sub-criteria under the description of self-directed study skills. We also asked students to list some of the ways they have learned, what was learned and why the activity was a learning experience, in response to the criterion of variety of learning activities. The approach of using a specific reading as a "jumping-off" point for students to examine their own learning experiences has proven to be beneficial. Students seem to be gaining a clear understanding of the UWW graduation criteria and of the process of integrating academic

and experiential learning.

The process for many adult students is one of learning to think in new ways, to look for relationships, and to communicate in such a way that each learning experience can be evaluated. The composite of such learning experiences makes the UNI adult student an autonomous, responsible, self-directed learner.

Overview of Long Term Degree Plan Re. UNM Graduation Criteria

Name MARY JONES Quarter of Admission FALL 1976

Main Study Area DAY CARE ADMINISTRATION Projected Qtr. of Graduation Spring 1978

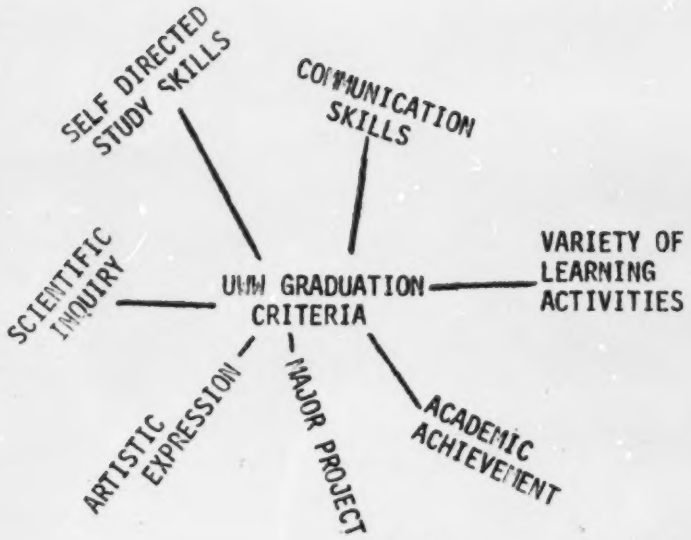
Date 4-77

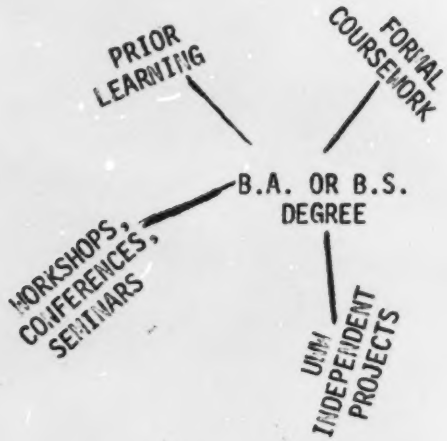
Graduation Criterion: Academic Achievement
(Identify Specific Criterion)

| | Formal Coursework | Comp. Date | Workshops Conferences Seminars | Comp. Date | UNM Directed Study Projects | Comp. Date | Life/Work Exp. | Comp. Date |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Completed Activities (Descriptive Titles Only) | Introductory Child Psychology | 1975 | Curriculum workshop | 1974 | Setting Up a volunteer staff in a day care center | 1977 | Founded Day Care Center | 1975 |
| | Topics in Child Psychology | 1975 | Volunteers' Workshop | 1975 | | | Teacher in Day care Center | 1973-1976 |
| | Infancy | 1975 | | | | | | |
| | Intro to Mgmt. | 1976 | | | | | | |
| | Mgmt in Human Service Agencies | 1976 | | | | | | |
| Projected Activities (Descriptive titles only) | Behavioral & Emotional Problems | 1977 | Seminar in After School Care | 1977 | Co-Directing A Day Care Center | 1978 | Present job experiences | 1977-1978 |
| | Socialization of Children | 1977 | | | | | | |
| | Developmental Psychology | 1977 | | | | | | |
| | Planning & Administration of Social Services | 1978 | | | | | | |
| | Personnel Mgmt. in Human Service Agencies | 1978 | | | | | | |

UNIVERSITY WITHOUT WALLS
SEMINAR IN PROCESS EDUCATION*

DEVELOPING THE LONG_TERM DEGREE PLAN




*Goals of Process Education Seminar: the development of learning skills (questioning, reflecting, analyzing, synthesizing) for the purpose of integrating various forms of learning (experience, independent projects) into an individualized baccalaureate degree plan.

UNIVERSITY WITHOUT WALLS GRADUATION CRITERIA

1) Self-Directed Study Skills: You will need to present evidence which demonstrates your ability to design and carry out study projects of your own choosing. In order to meet this requirement, you will need to evidence the following conceptual and practical skills: a) question-asking ability; b) appropriate resource identification and use; c) ability to develop suitable rationales for studies undertaken; d) willingness and ability to engage in self-evaluation in studies pursued; and e) an ability to pursue such studies in a self-directed manner wherein the student is the primary initiator of learning activity.

2) Communication Skills: You will be expected to present materials which clearly evidence an ability to write effectively and intelligibly in the English language. This involves, minimally, meeting commonly accepted criteria of organization, grammar, and punctuation used in the evaluation of written materials. In addition, you will, in a general manner, evidence an active pattern of seeking to share your questions and insights with others while at the same time seeking out the communications of others. These more general communication skills may be evidenced through the use of other than written media.

3) Academic Achievement: You shall present evidence of learning in your main study area(s) in terms of the following: a) knowledge of the commonly recognized historical and contemporary core (basic) literature and a consequent understanding of the basic vocabulary of the field; b) an understanding of main theoretical concepts or perspectives in the field; c) a demonstrated ability to use the basic methods of investigation required for study in the field; and d) exploration of the ways the main field of study relates to broader concerns (problems/issues) of contemporary or future society.

4) Variety of Learning Activities: You shall present evidence of having pursued learning in a variety of ways and contexts. The formal classroom, a job environment, the library, the experimental laboratory, etc. are some alternative contexts. Reading, field survey, experimental research and so forth, are some alternative ways of learning.

5) Scientific Inquiry: As a degree candidate, you will need to demonstrate your understanding of the scientific method of inquiry. At minimum, this understanding involves the following:

a) An understanding of the differences between objective and subjective knowledge;

b) An understanding of the philosophical foundations of science. This understanding involves knowing about the beliefs and assumptions scientists have regarding the order of the universe and the relationships between phenomena.

c) An understanding of the basic ingredients of an experimental paradigm. This understanding involves knowing what a basic experiment looks like and the factors which must be taken into account in the construction of an experiment.

d) An understanding of how science relates to your world. What does science mean to you as a person?

As a degree candidate you will not be required to have actually used the scientific method in your studies. However, you must demonstrate your clear understanding of the scientific method of inquiry in terms of each of the categories given above.

6) Artistic Expression: You shall demonstrate an understanding of the artistic process as it is expressed in the fine arts (for example, painting, sculpture, theatre, architecture, dance, literature, music). You may demonstrate this understanding in one of two ways:

a) An understanding of the artistic process can be gained through direct experience with a medium.

b) An understanding of the artistic process can be gained through the investigation of some aspect of the fine arts from the perspective of "critic" (one examining the artistic works of others).

In both cases, you must evidence, as an end point, an understanding of the artistic process as one mode of inquiry about the world; either your own creative endeavors, or examination of the works of others may be used as a "means" to this end.

7) Major Project: You shall present a major project in your main study area. The project shall evidence quality work in the main study area toward the goal of demonstrating that you are more than a consumer of what earlier scholars and artists have offered. The form of the major project -- be it in the written or another medium -- is your choice. The major project shall be your contribution to your main field of study.

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